

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Chairman, today I rise to thank Chairman PETERSON Chairman BACA, and members of the House Agriculture Committee for their continued commitment and interest in supporting our agriculture industry, producers—and specifically supporting modernization of the food stamp program, increasing access to fresh produce, particularly for low-income neighborhoods and working with the Congressional Black Caucus and urban Members to accommodate the needs of diverse communities.

Throughout our Nation, we have a host of communities that are disconnected from accessing fresh fruits and vegetables. An increasing number of families are facing hunger and food insecurity: according to USDA's most recent data, more than 35 million Americans are unable to purchase food on a regular basis. Both sets of problems stem in part from the same cause: in urban as well as rural areas, too many low-income families live in "food deserts" where access to fresh, healthy foods is lacking.

I have worked with my fellow urban Members on a package of urban needs—ranging from making mandatory funds for the Community Food Project grant, increasing access to fresh fruits and produce, defining the term food desert, and creating a new Urban Health Enterprise grant program to strengthen links between producers to actual providers in urban communities.

All but one of these amendments are included in the Manager's Amendment, and I thank the Chairman for working with us to ensure urban members have a stake in the farm bill.

Mr. Chairman, although we still must find funding for the Community Food Projects grant; overall, the 2007 Farm Bill contains significant gains to promote access, expansion and education on nutrition.

As you may know, with regard to nutrition, the bill modernizes the food stamp program by: 1. Requiring all states go to an electronic system; 2. Increasing the minimum food benefit of participants; 3. Indexing asset limits and excludes retirement and education accounts, and combat pay.

The nutrition title extends and funds the Emergency Food Assistance Program to provide needed commodities to food banks and homeless shelters.

And it expands the authority of the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program and creates a demonstration project to evaluate strategies to address obesity among low-income communities.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, for far too many urban dwellers, the choice comes down to traveling long distances to buy groceries or shopping at expensive corner stores that often sell high-fat, high-sugar convenience food and little or no fresh produce. The consequences are byproducts of poverty: diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

In the interests of public health, cost-efficiency, and social justice, we should consider policies to increase the availability of and access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved neighborhoods and communities.

I call on my colleagues to support the Farm Bill, because of the gains in nutrition the committee has included in this bill.

In addition to supporting farmers and our agriculture industry; this bill increases healthy food options in our poorest communities, cre-

ates incentives for producers and retailers to provide foods that provide healthy food options, and increasing consumer education about healthy alternatives at school and home.

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Chairman, I rise to commend the Agriculture Sub-committee Chairwoman, Ms. DELAURO, and the ranking Republican, Mr. KINGSTON. They have done a commendable job in putting this measure together in this first year in their respective positions.

All along the way, Ms. DELAURO reached across the aisle to sound out the concern of the members on this side of the aisle—and the work product shows her bi-partisan efforts.

While I do not agree with everything in the bill, I think it is a good product, all things considered. I especially want to thank the Chairwoman for her efforts to increase funding in the bill for the cooperative State research, education and extension service. The CSREES funding level was below the level where it should have been coming out of the subcommittee.

After hearing the concerns of many members, Ms. DELAURO and Mr. KINGSTON closed ranks and fixed the problem. That funding gap was a particular issue to many members, especially those from rural, farming areas.

I am pleased to note that the bill contains much in the way of agriculture research funding in a number of areas. This is important to many areas, particularly renewable fuels and food production science, to name two areas. The more we can make substantive progress in both of these areas, the better for the consumer and the farm community.

I do want to point out a couple of areas where I think we can and should improve on the bill. First, there is a provision, section 746, which currently reads, "no funds in this act may be used to authorize qualified health claims for conventional foods".

I understand that there will be an amendment later on that stipulates no funds for FDA will be used for this purpose. However, this amendment does not address the problem.

If this provision, or a similar one, is intended to help FDA avoid wasted time and resources on frivolous petitions, it misses the mark. Nothing in the language removes FDA's responsibility to review these petitions, as required by law. The provision only denies final approval, or "authorization" of the use of valid claims.

This is bad health policy, and it is bad fiscal policy, and I urge the chairwoman to relook at the provision in conference, lest its impact come back to haunt us.

On another issue, the horse slaughter language, the provision, as written, is opposed by animal experts across the country—real experts, including veterinarians and others. The way the language is written, it precludes health inspections and certifications for the legal transport of horses, for example.

Finally, I think, like some others on both sides of the aisle, that we have short-changed some necessary program areas, on occasion, in the past.

But I also think that, as with some other bills, we are going a little far in adding extra spending. Too much spending can do as much damage as too little spending.

It is important to remember that when we give agencies too much money, they spend more than they need to spend simply to hold their annual baseline intact. This is not a healthy way to manage the Nation's resources.

We have some discretion here, and we should use that discretion since, apparently, we have turned a blind eye to the serious and growing problem of out-of-control entitlements.

In summary, let me, again, commend the gentlewoman from Connecticut. I think you have done a fine job, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to improve this bill as we go forward.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to rise in strong support of the H.R. 3161, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and related agencies appropriations bill for fiscal year 2008.

As a member of this Subcommittee, I am extremely proud of the work of the Subcommittee and our members on both sides of the aisle, in crafting a bill which truly impacts and touches the lives of everyone who lives in this great Nation of ours, as well as millions of individuals around the world.

Our bill invests in Rural America, providing funding to accommodate some \$5.1 billion in affordable loans for low income families in rural areas, which will support approximately 38,000 single family homeownership opportunities.

We invest in rural communities, by expanding resources devoted to economic development programs and access to broadband telecommunication services to bridge the digital divide in rural, underserved areas.

We address the health care and emergency needs of rural areas, as well as providing support for the rebuilding of our Nation's rural infrastructure.

We invest in the protection of the Nation's Public Health, by providing nearly \$930 million for the Food Safety and Inspection Service as well as \$1.7 billion for the Food and Drug Administration—including increases to begin a transformation of food safety regulation, improving drug safety, monitor prescription drug advertisements and expanding the review of new generic drug applications.

To fight hunger in America, our bill makes investments which will expand nutrition, providing \$958 million for nutrition programs, including the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program and the Simplified Summer Food program.

We provide \$5.6 billion for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which is expected to benefit over 8.4 million Americans over the next year.

Not only does this bill provide the resources necessary to keep nearly 26 million of the nation's poorest from going hungry, we also expand Emergency Food Assistance Program, so that food banks, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding sites have needed resources. The bill also expands the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program to all 50 states.

We invest in the transformation of our Energy Future, providing \$1.2 billion for renewable energy, which was \$955.3 million above 2007 and \$810.4 million above the President's request—and includes funding for bio-energy and renewable energy research and development, including loans and grants in rural areas. The resources provided will be key building blocks in the expansion of renewable fuel production needed to encourage American energy independence and protect our environment.